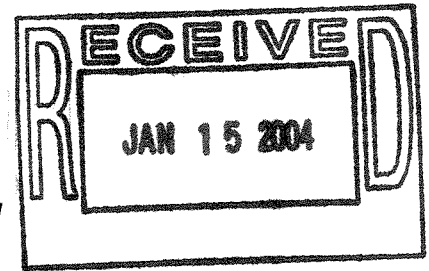


TOWN OF ACTON
Building Department
INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATION



To: Board of Selectmen **Date:** January 14, 2004
From: Garry A. Rhodes, Building Commissioner *GAR*
Subject: Building Department work load and staffing levels

In 1985, when I was first employed by the Town of Acton, the staffing level had just been increased from three full-time employees to four full-time employees. Today we are back to three full-time employees but have three part-time employees working a total of forty-four hours without benefits. The main function of the Department has not changed. The Building Department enforces most land use regulations enacted by the Town as well as many state regulations. The work load associated with enforcement has increased substantially.

During the same time frame, the Town has increased from nine zoning districts to twenty-four zoning districts. It is my understanding another district is proposed for this Annual Town Meeting. Each zoning district has separate regulations scattered throughout the Zoning Bylaw. With so many different zoning districts the possibility of errors increase, requiring us to spend more time just answering simple questions like what are the side yard requirements.

In 1985, the majority of residential development was by Subdivision enforced by the Planning Board and Town Engineer. In the last few years, the majority of residential development is a combination Subdivision and Special Permit now enforced by the Building Commissioner. The Special Permit has us reviewing house styles, drainage and erosion complaints, setbacks different from the underlying zoning District and enforcing all conditions the Planning Board attaches. We again appear to be experiencing a shift in residential development from Special Permit to Comprehensive Permits. We are facing a possibility of six additional Comprehensive Permits handled by the Board of Appeals requiring our support.

The sign regulations have increased from five pages in 1985 to fifteen pages today, with more changes proposed for this Annual Town Meeting.

The town adopted a Historic Districts Bylaw and a Demolition Delay Bylaw and Groundwater Protection Districts. The Building Commissioner enforces them.

Recently the Board of Selectmen adopted a policy for A-Frames within the right of way and banners across the street in three locations. The Building Commissioner provides staff support to process applications, schedule times and the Fire Department installs them. No fees are charged.

We now provide staff support to the Commission on Disabilities including attending their monthly meetings.

The Building Department took over secretarial support for the Board of Appeals without increasing hours or paying overtime. This has placed a considerable strain on the Department with

a recent Comprehensive Permit Application having 10 additional meetings. The secretary takes time off with professional staff covering her administrative task.

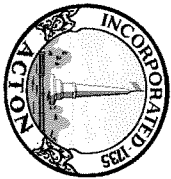
The total number of permits increased from 1,200 issued in 1986 to over 1,700 this year. Only a couple years ago we issued over 2,000 permits (see attached graph).

The changes in state regulations since 1985 have also increased our work load. We have to insure all contractors have Workers' Compensation MGL c152 §25c, dispose of construction debris in a licensed solid waste disposal facility MGL c40 § 54, make sure home improvement contractors are registered under MGL c142A. The energy codes have become more complex. In 1985 as long as the windows were thermopane, walls had R11, ceilings R30 and floors R19 it complied. Today energy codes are performance based.

Today we process a tremendous amount of public documents. Prior to microfilming records, we were adding two file cabinets and one flat file each year. We would have run out of office space long ago without microfilming. Today, we maintain your Site Plan Special Permit files (in 1985 they were maintained and processed by the Board of Selectmen's secretary), the Board of Appeals files (they were maintained and processed by the Board of Appeals secretary) as well as Building Permits and property files. Most are filmed within a few years which provide easy access for the public.

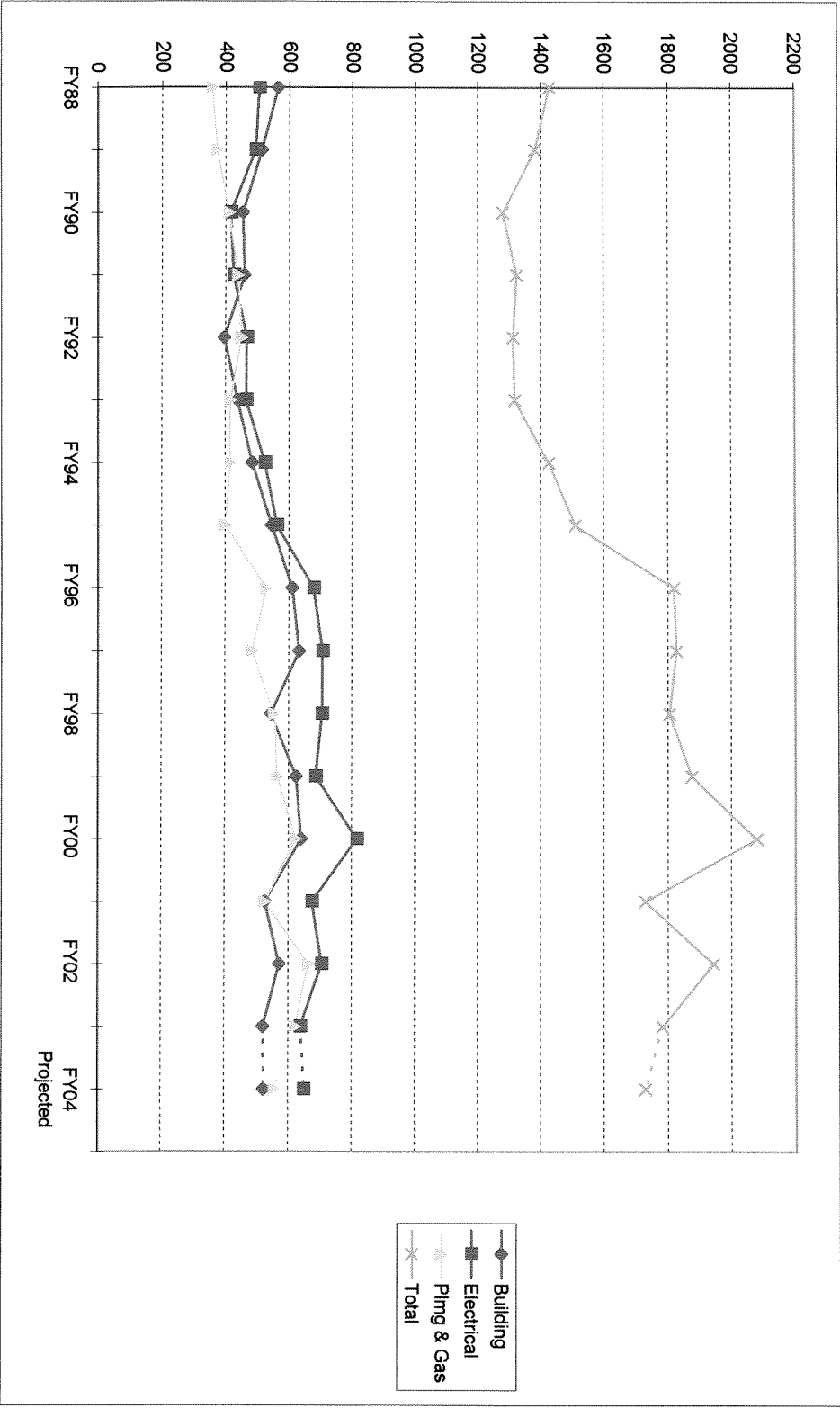
Recently we were told to review a new exterior lighting bylaw. I have to say UNCLE. We have absorbed what has been asked of us in the past. We now need additional help if we are to further increase our workload. I have not seen the proposed changes to the Zoning Bylaw for East Acton Village but we will need additional help to take this on.

I would respectfully suggest that in light of the proposed decrease in staffing we delay implementation of more laws until additional staffing is added. I would also recommend you consider placing banner and A-frame signs within the public way on hold until staffing levels are restored.



Acton Building Department Permits

	FY86	FY87	FY88	FY89	FY90	FY91	FY92	FY93	FY94	FY95	FY96	FY97	FY98	FY99	FY00	FY01	FY02	FY03	FY04 Projected
Building	512	462	564	514	454	459	395	437	485	547	612	633	545	624	640	527	572	521	522
Electrical	269	438	505	494	415	424	467	465	524	562	678	708	707	687	816	676	706	639	650
Piping & Gas	418	334	357	374	411	440	451	416	418	401	531	487	555	566	624	527	666	623	557
Total	1199	1234	1426	1382	1280	1323	1313	1318	1427	1510	1821	1828	1807	1877	2080	1730	1944	1783	1729



FY04 projection based on actual permits issued in the first six months.